



Children and the Media:

Advocating for the Future

A guide for parents and carers

The media can exert a powerful influence on your child's health and development. This influence can be both beneficial and harmful. For example, your child's knowledge and understanding of the world may increase by watching educational programs, whereas watching violent TV programs may lead to violent behaviour in your child. For further information, go to the discussion paper at www.racp.edu.au

The media has an effect on your child by:

- * Directly delivering content to your child, for example through TV, internet, and video games, perhaps without your awareness of the actual content;
- * Reducing the time your child has to spend on other activities; for example sport, reading and other recreation that is important for your child's development.

The rapid advances in media technologies are a challenge to all parents/guardians/carers. You may be uncertain about how to control or limit your child's exposure to the media. Hopefully this guide will give you some ideas on how you can help your child use the media in a positive way.

Suggestions for the whole family

- * Set an example for your child. Limit the amount of TV you watch.
- * Take time to get to know about the types of media that your child uses – spend as much time assisting your child to use media in a positive way, as you spend on other aspects of parenting.
- * Set a total daily time limit for TV, video games, Internet etc for your child (experts have suggested that two hours is a reasonable limit).
- * TV, videos, Internet etc should be in open spaces of your home, where you can be fully aware of program content. Your child's bedroom is not an appropriate place for these.
- * Have open discussions with your child about the use of media – encourage him or her to think through the benefits or otherwise of programs, and to be active in their choices of media use.
- * Turn off the TV, video, radio etc so your child can concentrate on homework.
- * Try having the family meal time with all media turned off. Use this time to talk together as a family.
- * Sometimes media, especially television, is useful for entertainment and relaxation – in your family this could be reward for other achievements (finishing homework, household chores). Discuss the entertainment value of programs with your child.
- * Read to your child at bedtime. Avoid letting your child use TV, video games or the Internet at bedtime.
- * Encourage your child to participate in non media related activities eg. reading, sport, hobbies.



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Some other helpful suggestions

TELEVISION, VIDEO AND ELECTRONIC GAMES

- * Avoid the temptation to use the TV as a 'babysitter'
- * Younger children (especially under two years age) will benefit more from interactive activities with you. Avoid letting your young child watch TV.
- * Help your child choose appropriate programs. Become familiar with the meaning of ratings/classifications of TV programs and video games.
- * Sit with your child and watch the program too. Talk about what you have watched. Discuss important issues.
- * Be aware that advertisements during the program are designed to influence your child. Talk with your child about the advertisements that you see.
- * Turn the television off after the program has finished.
- * Check out the video or electronic games that your child plays with. Is there much violence?
- * Do not allow your child to play with games that you do not like.
- * Discourage your child from playing with video games when he/she has friends over.

INTERNET

- * Your child probably knows more about the Internet than you do!
- * Be aware that it is very easy for your child to access violence, pornography and other inappropriate information on the Internet. You can try to reduce this by making sure you have a way to filter or control what your child accesses on the Internet. Many Internet Service providers offer web content filters. Remember these don't replace parental supervision.
- * Avoid letting your child use Internet chat rooms.
- * Talk about what to do if your child opens pornographic material on the net.
- * Make sure your child knows that he/she should **NEVER**:
 - agree to meet with anyone they have met over the Internet
 - give names, addresses or any other personal details to someone else over the Internet
 - open unsolicited email or email attachments (computer viruses are a common problem with using the Internet)

- download programs from the internet without your permission

Remember that information on the Internet is not always true. This is particularly the case with health information. (Discuss with your child how to tell if the information is reliable or not.)

MEDIA EDUCATION

- * Find out what media education programs are provided to your children at school. Obtain a copy of the curriculum so that when your child is studying these matters, you can also discuss them.
- * If your school is not providing media education, ask the school principal why.
- * Contact parent assistance organisations (such as Young Media Australia www.youngmedia.org.au). They have a good deal of general information, and are able to respond to specific questions you may have. They have a parent help line for children's media: 1800 700 357.



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